



Flavorful and Functional!

Herbs & Spices

Herb vs Spice

The leaf of a plant used in cooking is generally referred to as a culinary herb. Any other part of the plant, such as the buds, bark, roots, berries, seeds, and the stigma of a flower is called a spice. Herbs and spices have a long history and new research is exploring the possible therapeutic uses for herbs and spices used in cooking – primarily for their antioxidant, antimicrobial, and antiviral properties.

7 Spices for Health

Curcumin, found in turmeric and curry powder, contains curcuminoids that appear to have antioxidant, antiviral, antibacterial, and antifungal properties with potential activity against cancer, diabetes, arthritis, Alzheimer's and other chronic diseases. Cinnamon's active ingredients are polyphenols which scientists think may act like insulin – however recent studies show it has only a possible modest effect. Cayenne pepper (ground red pepper) is a concentrated source of capsaicin, a phytochemical that may target pathways involved in cancer development and inflammation. Oregano has antioxidants, phytochemicals and antimicrobial activity. Rosemary, like other green herbs, has antioxidants and antimicrobial properties linked to its polyphenol composition. Ginger is a mixture of several hundred chemicals including gingerols, salicylate, and curmucin which may play a role preventing chronic disease. Thyme, nutmeg, garlic, mint and basil are also being studied. However, scientists point out that more research is needed before intake amount or supplement recommendations are made.

Mix it up

In the meantime, there are many dietary implications for increasing your intake of herbs and spices. They help lower salt, fat and sugar intake as well as support an increase in the variety of food intake and thus, nutrient diversity. For example, they are an alternative to salt as a seasoning, they support an increased intake of fruits and vegetables by adding flavor and interest, and they improve low fat cooking methods for foods such as soups, salad dressings, and marinades. Herbs are clustered into families so traditional combinations may be exchanged with others from the same family. For example, the mint family contains not only mint but basil, marjoram, oregano, sage, thyme and rosemary. The parsley family includes parsley, dill and coriander (cilantro). Conduct your own experiments and enjoy the flavor of herbs and spices!

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